

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

DLOS-06 EUR-12 EB-07 TRSE-00 /080 W

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FM AMCONSUL SAPPORO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, JA

SUBJECT: LOCAL CONTROVERSY HIGHLIGHTS MISGIVINGS ABOUT VALUE OF
TERRITORIAL REVERSION MOVEMENT

1. SUMMARY: RECENT ATTEMPT TO EXCLUDE SIGNATURE DRIVE SPONSORED BY
NORTHERN TERRITORIES REVERSION GROUPS FROM FEBRUARY SAPPORO SNOW
FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS SKEPTICISM HELD IN SOME QUARTERS HERE TOWARD
VALUE OF REVERSION MOVEMENT. CRITICS ARGUE THAT, GIVEN SOVIET IN-
TRANSIGENCE AND WEAKNESS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT, MOVEMENT'S ACTIVITIES ARE
BOTH FUTILE AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. LEADERS OF REVERSION
ORGANIZATIONS CLAIM, HOWEVER, TO HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT
PROGRESS IN ATTRACTING POPULAR SUPPORT AND ASSERT THAT THEIR ROLE IN
BACKING UP GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE RETURN OF DISPUTED
ISLANDS IS NOW MORE VITAL THAN EVER. REVERSION ACTIVISTS ARE LOBBYING
VIGOROUSLY AND PROBABLY SUCCESSFULLY FOR REINSTATEMENT OF THEIR
SIGNATURE DRIVE IN SNOW FESTIVAL. BUT EVIDENT INDIFFERENCE OF
PUBLIC TO FLAP INDICATES THAT ISSUES IT RAISES ARE NOT
CENTRAL TO CONCERNS OF MOST PEOPLE HERE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN SURPRISE MOVE DECEMBER 17, SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL'S PUBLIC
RELATIONS COMMITTEE VOTED TO EXCLUDE FROM FESTIVAL SITE ANNUAL
SIGNATURE DRIVE SPONSORED BY NORTHERN TERRITORIES REVERSION
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ORGANIZATIONS. COMMITTEE JUSTIFIED ACTION WITH ARGUMENT THAT
SIGNATURE DRIVE, WHICH HAS BEEN HELD AT FESTIVAL SINCE 1969,
CREATES EXCESSIVE NOISE AND CONGESTION AND INJECTS INAPPROPRIATE
"POLITICAL OVERTONES" INTO FESTIVITIES. LEADERS OF LOCAL REVER-
SION ORGANIZATIONS INDIGNANTLY PROTESTED COMMITTEE'S DECISION AND
SOLICITED AID OF GOVERNOR AND MAYOR, AMONG OTHERS, IN EFFORT TO
SECURE REINSTATEMENT OF SIGNATURE DRIVE. FESTIVAL'S ORGANIZERS

HAVE RESPONDED BY DEFERRING ANNOUNCEMENT OF FINAL DECISION
ON ISSUE TO PLENARY SESSION OF THEIR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 18.

3. MOTIVATION BEHIND ATTEMPT TO EXCLUDE REVERSION MOVEMENT FROM
FESTIVAL IS NOT YET CLEAR AS CHAIRMAN OF PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE
AND REPUTED AUTHOR OF MOVE HAS DEPARTED COUNTRY AND IS UNAVAILABLE
FOR COMMENT. BUT MANY LOCAL OBSERVERS SPECULATE THAT COMMITTEE'S
ACTION WAS PROMPTED BY DESIRE NOT TO IRRITATE SOVIETS PRIOR TO
FORTHCOMING JAPAN-SOVIET FISHERY NEGOTIATIONS WHICH ARE EXPECTED
TO HAVE CRUCIAL IMPACT ON HOKKAIDO'S LARGE FISHING INDUSTRY. IN
OPINION OF THESE OBSERVERS, MOVE REFLECTED WIDESPREAD CONCERN HERE
THAT RECENT SOVIET 200-MILE DECLARATION PRESAGES UNUSUALLY TOUGH
BARGAINING ON BOTH FISHING AND TERRITORIAL ISSUES, WHICH OUGHT
NOT BE COMPLICATED BY PROVOCATION OF SOVIETS THROUGH OVERLY
ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT OF LOCAL PRO-REVERSION ACTIVITIES.

4. OUR SOUNDINGS IN LOCAL PRESS, LABOR AND POLITICAL CIRCLES
SUGGEST THAT SLAP AT REVERSION MOVEMENT MAY ALSO SPRING FROM MORE
DEEPLY-ROOTED SKEPTICISM TOWARD ITS CHARACTER AND AIMS. ONE
COMMON LINE OF CRITICISM IS ARGUMENT THAT, GIVEN SOVIET HARD-LINE
STANCE ON NORTHERN TERRITORIES ISSUE, PRO-REVERSION SIGNATURE
CAMPAIGNS AND PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS ARE FUTILE AND EVEN COUNTER-
PRODUCTIVE BECAUSE THEY ARE LIKELY TO HINDER AGREEMENT WITH SOVIETS
ON FISHING AND TRADE ISSUES WHICH ARE OF CONSIDERABLE LOCAL CONCERN.
CRITICS ALSO POINT OUT THAT HOKKAIDO BEARS BRUNT OF SOVIET DIS-
PLEASURE WITH PRO-REVERSION AGITATION, WHICH TYPICALLY TAKES FORM
OF RUSSIAN HARASSMENT OF LOCAL FISHING BOATS AND STEPPED-UP
OPERATIONS BY SOVIET TRAWLERS OFF HOKKAIDO'S SOUTHERN COAST.
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5. ANOTHER FREQUENTLY-VOICED CRITICISM IS CHARGE THAT REVERSION
MOVEMENT LACKS CREDIBILITY AS FORM OF PRESSURE ON SOVIETS BECAUSE
IT HAS BEEN UNABLE TO ATTRACT MASS SUPPORT. IN THIS VIEW, PUBLIC
APATHY TOWARD MOVEMENT STEMS FROM FADING MEMORIES OF RUSSIAN-
OCCUPIED ISLANDS; FROM CONVICTION THAT SOVIET INTRANSIGENCE MAKES
AGITATION USELESS; FROM IDEOLOGICAL SYMPATHY FOR SOVIETS FROM
LEFTISTS; AND FROM CONFUSION ABOUT SCOPE AND VALIDITY OF JAPAN'S
CLAIMS IN KURILES. RESULT, SAY CRITICS, IS THAT REVERSION ORGANI-
ZATIONS DRAW ACTIVE SUPPORT ONLY FROM RELATIVE HANDFUL OF TRUE
BELIEVERS AND RELY HEAVILY ON GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY AND PATRONAGE,
BOTH OF WHICH GIVEN THEIR ACTIVITIES A SOMEWHAT ARTIFICIAL AND
CONTRIVED CHARACTER UNLIKELY TO IMPRESS SOVIETS.

6. LEADERS OF REVERSION GROUPS COUNTER WITH CLAIM THAT THEY HAVE
MADE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS DURING PAST THREE YEARS IN MOBILIZING
GRASS-ROOTS SUPPORT AND DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION.
AS EVIDENCE, THEY CITE INCREASING COOPERATION BETWEEN HOKKAIDO-BASED
GROUPS AND RECENTLY FORMED REVERSION ORGANIZATIONS ELSEWHERE,

PARTICULARLY THOSE IN NEIGHBORING TOHOKU PREFECTURES. THEY ALSO POINT TO GROWING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SUCH CAMPAIGNS AS SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL SIGNATURE DRIVE WHICH LAST YEAR ATTRACTED ABOUT 70,000 SIGNATURES, MORE THAN TRIPLE FIGURE FOR 1973. THEY ASSERT, MOREOVER, THAT SOVIET 200-MILE DECLARATION MAKES IT IMPERATIVE TO INTENSIFY THESE ACTIVITIES TO STRENGTHEN HAND OF GOJ IN RESISTING POSSIBLE SOVIET ATTEMPT TO USE FISVING ISSUE TO FORCE CONCESSIONS ON TERRITORIAL PROBLEM.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH MINOR IN ITSELF, SNOW FESTIVAL CONTROVERSY HAS BROUGHT TO SURFACE DIVERGENT VIEWS OF VALUE OF PRO-REVERSION AGITATION NOT NORMALLY AIRED HERE. SOURCES IN PREFECTURAL ADMINISTRATION, WHICH IS CHIEF BACKER OF REVERSION MOVEMENT, ASSURE US THAT ENTIRE AFFAIR IS PRODUCT OF "MISGUIDED" THINKING OF ERRANT COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN AND THAT MOVEMENT STILL ENJOYS SOLID PUBLIC SUPPORT. BUT DELAY IN REACHING DECISION ON MATTER SUGGESTS THAT SKEPTICISM ABOUT ITS UTILITY MAY BE MORE WIDESPREAD THAN THESE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SOURCES INDICATE. MOREOVER, WE HAVE SO FAR SEEN LITTLE EVIDENCE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EITHER PRO OR CON, REENFORCING IMPRESSION THAT REVERSION ISSUE IS PROBABLY PERIPHERAL CONCERN FOR MOST PEOPLE HERE, AT LEAST RIGHT NOW.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition History: n/a
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